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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002294

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UNSC, TH, CB

SUBJECT: PREAH VIHEAR: THAI MFA ON JULY 28 TALKS, DAO VISIT
TO TEMPLE AREA

REF: A. BANGKOK 2276 (NEW FM APPOINTED)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2111 (FM RESIGNS)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Embassy Bangkok's Defense Attache visited the vicinity of the Preah Vihear temple on July 28; the atmosphere was calm, and there were no signs of a significant military build-up on the Thai side. The Foreign Ministry described the atmosphere of the July 28 Thai-Cambodian talks on Preah Vihear as "warm and cordial" and said both sides agreed to "exercise utmost restraint" and continue working bilaterally toward a peaceful settlement. Prime Minister Samak was reportedly pleased with the talks; the next round of talks has not yet been scheduled. A leading anti-government activist from the People's Alliance for Democracy told us his group did not intend to engage in further protests in the vicinity of Preah Vihear. We are optimistic that further bilateral discussions can result in a diplomatic solution. End Summary.

DAO VISIT TO THE BORDER AREA

[1](#)2. (C) Escorted by Thai military personnel, Embassy Bangkok's Defense Attache and 10 other members of the Attache Corps, visited the vicinity of the Preah Vihear temple on July 28. The group flew by helicopter to the local command center established in the border region by the Suranaree Task Force. The Thais briefed the group on the historical issues surrounding the Thai and Cambodian claims to Preah Vihear temple and the surrounding area. The Thais claimed that the Cambodians had violated the 2000 Memorandum of Understanding on boundary demarcation by maintaining a settlement of Cambodians in Thai territory, and by building a road into Thai territory.

[1](#)3. (C) The atmosphere in the vicinity of the temple appeared calm. The DATT observed a group of typical paramilitary

border patrol soldiers (not Army troops per se, but more like a militia operating under Army auspices). These troops, armed with M-16 rifles, were established in tents in the disputed territory, intermingled with their Cambodian counterparts. Thai officials explained that the two sides had agreed not to increase the number of troops in the area above 500, although they agreed each side could rotate fresh troops in as replacements. The DATT saw no tanks or artillery in the border area, and observed only a few military vehicles operating on local highways. Arriving by air, he saw no signs of a major military build-up. Villagers in the area appeared to be going about their daily business without special concerns, although the Thais maintain a series of checkpoints on roads in the area close to the temple area. (DAO will provide further reporting on this visit through military channels.)

MFA READOUT

14. (C) The MFA published on its website a statement characterizing the bilateral talks in positive terms (see para 8, below). In private conversation on July 29, MFA East Asia Department Director for Division II Kallayana Vipattipumiprates told us that the Thais preferred not to issue a joint statement with the Cambodians, partly because of the ramifications that had flowed from the June Joint Communique on the temple's inscription (ref B). Kallayana indicated there were no glaring points of disagreement between the two sides, and he characterized the Cambodian side as flexible, having made critical last-minute concessions. He confirmed that the bilateral Foreign Ministers' meeting would remain the primary mechanism for progress in the near term, although no date was set for the

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next round of talks.

MISCELLANY

15. (C) A Bangkok-based Ambassador told us that Prime Minister Samak told him privately at a reception on the night of July 28 that he was very pleased with the results of the talks. An Australian diplomat told us on July 29 that King Bhumibol had directed the hurried appointment of palace advisor Tej Bunnag as Foreign Minister (ref A), and this appointment reflected the King's serious concern over both the Preah Vihear tension and Thailand's chairmanship of ASEAN.

PAD NOT RETURNING TO THE BORDER

16. (C) Separately, Poloff met on July 28 with Somkiat Pongpaiboon, one of the core leaders of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). (The PAD recently engineered protests in the vicinity of Preah Vihear and requested both impeachment and criminal proceedings against government officials involved in formulating Thailand's policy toward the temple's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.) Somkiat said the PAD did not intend to engage in further protests in the vicinity of the temple; he emphasized that the core issue for PAD remained the disposition of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whom Somkiat expected would soon be convicted of criminal offenses unrelated to Preah Vihear.

COMMENT

17. (C) It does not appear that the Thais and Cambodians made a major breakthrough in their July 28 talks, but the tension between the two countries appears to have lessened somewhat in the wake of the election in Cambodia, and we are optimistic that further bilateral discussions can result in a diplomatic solution. Our DATT's visit to the area debunks a

number of overblown press stories on Thai military escalation around the temple with tanks, large artillery, etc. End Comment.

TEXT OF MFA'S STATEMENT

18. (U) On July 29, the Thai MFA put the following statement (labeled as a "story") on the MFA's website, www.mfa.go.th:

BEGIN TEXT:

On 28 July 2008, Mr. Tej Bunnag, Foreign Minister of Thailand, had a meeting with H.E. Mr. Hor Namhong, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia, in Siem Reap to discuss ways to resolve peacefully the situation in the border area adjacent to the Temple of Preah Vihear.

The meeting was held in a warm and cordial atmosphere, which reflected the goodwill and sincerity on both sides.

The Foreign Ministers concurred that both countries should exercise utmost restraint to avoid the possibility of armed confrontation, so that the current problem may be settled through peaceful means. They both shared the view that existing bilateral mechanisms should be used, including the Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Thai-Cambodian Joint Commission on Demarcation for Land Boundary (JBC) which was set up by the 2000 Memorandum of Understanding on the Survey and Demarcation of Land Boundary.

Both sides would recommend to their respective Governments to convene the next meeting of the JBC as soon as possible to discuss issues related to the survey and demarcation of the relevant sector under the Terms of Reference and Master Plan

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of the JBC (Khao Sattasom/Phnom Sethisom - BP 1), following the next Foreign Ministers' Meeting, at which remaining matters would be discussed.

The Ministers would also recommend to their respective Governments, as a provisional arrangement pending survey and demarcation by the JBC, to undertake:

1. De-mining of the area to be surveyed and demarcated by the JBC in a concerted manner;

2. Setting up of a Temporary Coordinating Task Force comprising the relevant agencies from both sides to address problems related to the area, including the Pagoda;

3. Redeploying both sides' respective troops out of the "Keo Sikha Kiri Svava" Pagoda, the area surrounding the Pagoda, and the Temple of Preah Vihear.

The Ministers noted that this arrangement shall be without prejudice to the rights of both sides regarding the survey and demarcation within the framework of the JBC and their legal positions.

The Thai Foreign Minister also noted that the Thai side's undertaking would have to be in accordance with Thailand's constitutional and domestic legal requirements.

END TEXT.
JOHN